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BRAC runs its course

Huntsville Times Redstone and the region prevail, but the process needs reform

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

The latest Base Realignment and Closure Commission's recommendations are a step away from reality. Within the next 40 or so days it will - unless something very strange indeed occurs be a done deal. And North Alabama will be a big winner in jobs and economic growth.

Congress must now say "yea" or "nay" to the entire package. Too many incumbents have too much at stake to reject it. Eventually, Redstone Arsenal will gain a command, a headquarters, more work and at least 1,755 new federal jobs - and an additional 2,000 to 3,000 new contractor jobs for Madison County.

This area did so well because Redstone Arsenal is integral to U.S. defense. Workers here are second to none. And local economic development and governmental leaders worked diligently and effectively to get those points across to the BRAC Commission, to the Pentagon, to Congress and to President Bush.

Looking at it from one angle, North Alabama has learned to work the BRAC system as well as – if not better than - any region. The question arises, however, whether the system is flawed.

And that question was raised by the BRAC Commission in its final report to the president.

The BRAC panel, for one, said the Defense Department was overestimating savings the department has touted by some $30 billion. And saving money is one of the top goals of BRAC.

Further, it noted that some of the streamlining will make the military less efficient.

But most importantly, it questioned whether BRAC should have been postponed

The prime goal of military spending is to provide adequate national defense. That's been difficult
to focus on because members of Congress must work to promote the economy in their individual districts. BRAC helps remove some of the more egregious politics.

But it doesn't address the issue of how to meet defense needs best. The process must be reformed to do so. That's a vitally necessary next step.

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